TEN YEARS OF GOOD NOISE



NANDI HILLS BECOMES NEW CANVAS AS ECHOES OF EARTH MARKS DECADE OF MUSIC, ART & ECOLOGY

Bindu Gopal Rao

Echoes of Earth is a space where music, art, nature and sustainability come together meaningfully. What makes this 10th edition special is not just that the festival is celebrating ten years, but that it is evolving.

The festival has moved to a new landscape at Nandi Hills, giving it a completely different scale and an opportunity to create a deeper connection with nature.

"We are also looking at this edition as a celebration of the community that has built Echoes over the years: artists, musicians, architects, designers, environmentalists, volunteers and, most importantly, our audiences. For us, ten years is not a destination. It's a reminder of why we started and an opportunity to take that vision much further," says Roshan Netalkar, Founder & Festival Director.

The evolution has been quite remarkable. Ten years ago, the festival landscape in India was largely dominated by mainstream music, with a relatively limited understanding of what a festival experience could be.

"I also think there has been a significant shift towards experience-led festivals. People want to participate, discover, interact and be part of something. Music is still the heart of a festival, but the overall environment, design, art, food, community and sense of belonging are becoming equally important," adds Netalkar.

Heart for ecology

The theme for this edition is "Arteries of Life", which looks at the interconnectedness of nature and how everything around us is part of a larger living system. There is a beautiful connection to Nandi Hills as well, which is the origin of several rivers that flow through the region.

"The landscape itself gives us an opportunity to tell this story through our design, installations and experiences. We want people to discover these ideas as they move through the festival, through art installations, architecture, music and interactive experiences. I think the most important thing is to make environmental conversations accessible and experiential rather than instructional," says Netalkar.

Younger audiences, especially, are very receptive to ideas when they are presented creatively without sounding preachy. This is why the team wants them to experience why these issues matter and hopefully carry that thought with them long after the festival.

At Echoes, the team has spent years experimenting with circular design, repurposed materials, waste management, responsible sourcing and reducing its environmental footprint. Many of its installations and stages are designed around the idea of re-using materials and giving them a second life.

"We also believe sustainability must include people. Our waste management ecosystem, for example, creates meaningful opportunities for women from marginalised communities, who play a significant role in managing the festival's waste. There are challenges, of course, particularly when it comes to infrastructure, vendors, costs and the availability of sustainable alternatives. But I think the industry needs to start treating sustainability as an integral part of production design rather than an additional cost or responsibility," adds Netalkar.



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ROSHAN NETALKAR,
FOUNDER & FESTIVAL DIRECTOR





Engaging with artistes

Artistes and music bring people together, but what makes them return year after year is the larger identity and emotional connection they develop with the festival.

At Echoes, the team has always tried to build something beyond the two days of the festival. The Greener Side, for instance, is its year-round initiative through which it engages with communities, conducts smaller activations and keeps conversations around sustainability, conservation and responsible living alive.

The festival also works with a larger creative community of artists, designers, architects and environmental practitioners who contribute to its evolution.

"I think the future of festivals lies in building communities rather than just audiences. The event should be the biggest expression of a culture that exists throughout the year, not the only time that culture comes alive," says Netalkar.

A spokesperson from the band When Chai Met Toast says, "For this edition, we'd love to take the audience on a journey that starts somewhere intimate and familiar and gradually builds into something expansive, uplifting and unexpected."

When Chai Met Toast's music brings together different sounds, cultures and emotions, but at its heart, it is about finding common ground and celebrating the little things.

"We hope that by the end of the set, a crowd of strangers feels a little more like a community, having shared a moment of pure joy together."

Over the last ten years, the event has helped demonstrate that a festival can have a strong musical identity while also standing for something larger. It can be commercially viable, creatively ambitious and environmentally conscious.

Today, Echoes is not just an event that happens once a year. It is a platform for artistes, independent musicians, designers, environmentalists and audiences who share a certain way of looking at the world.